Nursing Assistants’ Use of Personal Protective Equipment Regarding Contact With Excreta Contaminated With Antineoplastic Drugs

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PURPOSE: To examine the feasibility of observing and interviewing nursing assistants about handling of antineoplastic drugs contaminated with excreta, acceptability of a measure of personal protective equipment (PPE) use with nursing assistants, and predictors of PPE use.

PARTICIPANTS & SETTING: 27 nursing assistants in an inpatient hematology-oncology unit at an academic medical center in the southeastern United States.

METHODOLOGIC APPROACH: This was an exploratory, multimethod study using observation, verbally administered questionnaires, and interviews. Research variables included recruitment rates, acceptability of observation, and understandability of a safe-handling instrument.

FINDINGS: Observed use of double gloves, chemotherapy gowns, and face shields was low; use of plastic-backed pads when flushing excreta was high.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Nursing assistants are willing to participate in research. Standardized training and education about PPE use are needed.


Like family members, nursing assistants perform intimate personal care duties as part of their role in caring for patients receiving antineoplastic drugs, including feeding, bathing, toileting, dressing, grooming, repositioning, and changing linens, which repeatedly expose them to the bodily fluids of patients (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Findings from the limited studies on nursing assistants’ exposure to antineoplastic drugs suggest that